

EW-01-16-C
Aidan Maher, Irish Fiddler, Wollaston, MA
Eleanor Wachs, Interviewer
Date of Interview: 5/20/01

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| 000 | Introduction. |
| 002 | Talks about his background and how he came to Boston area "I came to the States in 1986 and stayed in Southie for about a month and then I moved to Bridgewater. Less than a year later I moved to Quincy. Left Ireland for personal reasons. " I had a rough time in life, and I came here to get a change."

EW: Did you play music when you were a child? Do you come from a musical family?

AM: Yes. I started playing when I was six. All of my brothers play, and my father plays the harmonic and also the old melodeon. So that's where the music came from. But it was my eldest brother who really influenced me. I was taught there by an old fiddle player. After one year I was sent to the school of music, so every week I got both sides of it, classical and traditional |
| 10 | Grew up in County Dublin. " I lived in a little town called Glasthule. Nobody's ever heard of it." "Glasthule. It's so small that if you went through too fast you wouldn't even know you going through it. We weren't city people at all. We were way outside the city." |
| 22 | EW: So there was a lot of music in your house growing up?

AH: My eldest brother played accordion and keyboards. My next brother played drums, and the next fellow played accordion, keyboard, saxophone, and clarinet. My younger brother played guitar, and I played them all. I strictly play all fiddle and mandolin. Back then I played trumpet, double bass. When the band took a break, I played drums. When my other brother took a break, then I played bagpipes for a while. I haven't played any of those instruments since when I was in my teens. I strictly play fiddle, mandolin, and tenor banjo now.

EW: And you sing as well. |
| 30 | AH: Yah. I like to sing.

EW: Tell me what tunes you would play?

EW: Most of the tunes I learned were either from my eldest brother Jerry. As far as the Irish tunes was concerned, he used to bring me down to the local Comhaltas, which is now the head branch of in Monkstowne. Back |

then it was in a town of Black Rock. One of the teachers there was a very famous fiddle player called Joe Liddy. Even as a small kid I got along well with Joe. He used to help me a lot. He would take me to one side. If I were struggling with a tune he would help me. At that time, I was involved in a ceilidh band. In that ceilidh band there were some famous players today, such as Brendan [can't recall name]. Some of them have gone on to become pretty famous musicians now.

45 EW: How did you learn the tunes?

AH: Most of the Irish tunes were either through my brother or through the Comhaltas branch at the time.

EW: Do you read music?

50 AH: Almost everything I did was true music. I very seldom would pick up a song by ear. I didn't do that until I was in my teens when there were five of us together...you learn from the guy beside you or the girl next to you. Now I tell them all, bring your music. Don't be afraid to bring your music.

EW: What were some of the common tunes you'd play? You did bring your fiddle, so you could demonstrate.

AH: The big thing of course was the reels. "The Mason's Apron;" everybody had to know "The Mason's Apron." Then there were "Peter Street" and a tune called "The Dawn" So many that it's hard to actually name them.

40 When I got into my late teens, I got into a different love for Irish music. There are so many aspects to Irish music. Too many people just strictly play reels and jigs and leave it at that... It's beautiful. It's played all over the world, and people don't always realize that they're playing an Irish composer's music. Then there are waltzes written by quite a few people. I just wrote a waltz last year, and I played it for the first time in Ireland this year. There's a thing called slip jigs. It's a 9/8 time, and that's just a beautiful tempo. Set dances. Then you've got polkas, slides, so when I play I try to vary so it would nearly take a half hour before I'd get back to another reel because I like to play all the music.

75 EW: Could you take your fiddle and give an example?

AH: Yes. No problem. (Begins tuning.)

EW: Tell me a little bit about the tune before you play it.

82 AH: This is a jig and it's in 6/8 times. The first one is a slower jig because there are so many triplets and variations in it. The second one is an older jig where there aren't so many variations so you can play it faster. (Plays two samples.)

AH: (Laughs.) There is O'Carolan's music. His most famous piece would be "The Concerto."

(he plays O'Carolan's Concerto)

100 AH: From there it just varies into whatever it is someone's looking for.

EW: How many tunes do you know? How large is your repertoire?

AH: I don't know. Definitely hundreds, but I don't know if it goes further than that.

EW: Where do you usually start when you're with your students? How do you introduce them to the music?

AH: First so all I insist that they learn to read music. I won't teach them unless they're prepared to learn to read music.

EW: You don't want them to play by ear?

AH: Yes, but they should first learn the music. That way they've got both things going. If they learn by ear in the beginning, then they miss out on the music end of it. Down the road they may discard the music, but at least I've given them the chance of having it.

130 They all start the same way. The first two weeks are spent strictly learning how to hold the fiddle, hold the bow. Strictly run the bow across the strings. They don't even put their fingers on the bow. Then from there I move on. I don't have a set pattern because everyone's different. I try to mold it around (the person). Some are faster; some are slower.

EW: Are the students all ages?

AH: The youngest I have is seven, and the oldest I have is 66. In between that I have 60 and about three in their 50's. ..There's a lot of the girls around her age, she's late 20's. From late 20s to mid-30s that's where there's most of the them are.

EW: What do you think the attraction is?

145 AH: I honestly don't know. Most of the people that I teach heard me play somewhere and ask me do I teach. I don't advertise, so everything comes from word of mouth or else from performances. I play at weddings sometimes and in the church. I do O'Carolan's Concerto in church like I just did, and that sometimes attracts them to the music.

156 AH: So that was the jig and the carol, and, of course, the big thing in fiddle playing is the reel. This one's called "The Humors of Tullah (sp?)" Tullah's a town in Ireland. It's the one that all the girls get the best kick out of. (Laughs.)

(Plays reel).

167 AH: The slip jig is played in 9/8 time that's different than the older jigs. It's got its own tune.

(Plays another tune.)

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EW: Do you think fiddle is meant to be played in a group?

AH: I like to play in a group, but having said that, I also like to perform on my own. (Laughs.)

EW: Tell me about your performing. You play at weddings. Mostly private stuff?

AH: Over the years I've played as far away as Hong Kong, when I played with a group of Ireland. We played all over Europe at some time. Of course, when I came here I've played in Canada a few times, and as far down as Virginia.

EW: Do you play for the Irish Cultural Center?

AH: I've been talking to them lately about giving lessons there, but they're very slow to act. So I don't know what's going to happen, but I've got to find somewhere shortly because I have to move my lessons out of the house. I'm in a bind at the moment.

EW: Could you rent at the Beechwood Community Center because they give lessons there.

AH: I don't know. I never really thought of that.

EW: Yah. I would check that out.

(Discussion of rental situation.)

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EW: So you've done a lot of performances. Now you mostly play for weddings? When you say private performances, what does that mean?

AH: No. Now I mostly play for private parties. That's the big thing I do now. Of course, every Wednesday night I play downstairs, but that's for the people I teach so that once they get to a certain level have an outlet, somewhere to play.

EW: How did that start?

AH: I started because I used to play in Bands for years, when I came here. And then I came to the stage where I wasn't very happy with what I was doing, and we were butchering the Irish music, and I was getting upset about it so I said, "There's only one way for me to do it. I need to go out now and do it my way." So I started a session at another place in Quincy, a place called Malachi's. We were there for quite a while actually, but they but they never actually had a license to have music, and while we weren't miked up or anything, but someone gave them a hard time so we crashed on that, and we moved up the road to Paddy Barry's.

EW: How long have you been there?

AH: About three years now.

EW: So that place has been around for a while now.

AH: He's about three and a half years there. We started six months after.

EW: So you play there every Wednesday night?

AH: Every Wednesday night. The only Wednesday I miss is when I go to Ireland. (Laughs.)

EW: Is it the same students or do you bring in? Who is in that group?

AH: The core group is myself; Timmy, the fiddle player on my right. I taught him about seven or eight years ago, and he's just become excellent, an exceptional musician. Then there's Tim Fitzpatrick on guitar and on my left, Chris O'Hearn, and after that Julie Cadigan is always there. Then after that they roll in and out. There could be another two or three next week, and a different two or three. Quite often we have some bodhran players come down.

EW: And the private parties.... Someone has a party and you're the strolling musician?

251 AH: No, it's mostly formal. I'll sit in a corner and just play away, or something like that. Then we also do something where three or four of us will play together. Sometimes my son and his partner (they play in the Boston area mostly) if they need to play for a function where there are Irish dancers, then Dad has to go. I play mandolin with them until the Irish dancers, and then I'd play fiddle.

EW: Tell me a little bit about your dancing.

264 AH: I danced from the time I was I don't even know when. I think from the time that I could walk. I performed in competition until well into my twenties, which is very unusual, but I loved it and stayed out, and I danced all over Europe along with playing the fiddle. We did quite well. Some All-Ireland medals for group dancing, not individual. It was later in life when I was eighteen or in my early twenties that's when I enjoyed dancing often. Again, I danced all over the place.

EW: How did you learn?

275 AH: My mum was a dancer, so she sent me to a local Irish dancer in our town. Everybody in my family danced. All my brothers and my sisters too... You see, Dublin is not known for, well, it's getting more now, but when I grew up, everybody thought, "Irish music. You learn that in the country." Our family was unusual. My parents were very much into history, and, needless to say, we were all politically minded. We didn't all think the same way, but we were all very politically minded.

290 EW: Did they speak Gaelic at all?

AH: My parents never did, but they insisted that we did. I don't speak it now, but when we were children we did. One of my brothers sends all of his children to a school that only teaches pure Irish, and they speak to each other in Irish. So it's nice to see.

We were very lucky. Our parents were very good to us. A lot ???

EW: What does your father do?

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AH: My Dad was a handyman. Dad never had much money. Whatever he had he put into us. Mum never worked. She did small little things here and there, but had enough looking after us. (Laughter.)

EW: Was she involved with this music, too?

AH: She would make us practice. You'd walk through the door coming home from school.

EW: Is your mother still around?

AH: No. Mom died very young. She was only 64. My Dad died the first year after I came to the States. They were fantastic people.

EW: They were a big influence on you.

AH: Yes. As far as the music was concerned, they knew how to do it without pushing. They never pushed. It was there, and you wanted to do it. I'd love to know how they did it. But whatever way they did it, and they had us all wrapped up into it. My older brother Jerry influenced me more than anyone.

EW: What's the story about step dancing in this community? (Quincy) It is a big ... Are you in touch with that?

AH: Very much so. I play for a lot them. The big school here in Quincy would be the Forbes School of Dancing. There are four sisters. They teach at St. John's Church.

EW: Near the Firestone Tire place?

AH: Yeah. A real nice family.

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EW: I'd like to get in touch with them.

AH: They're lovely people

EW: There were a bunch of local step dancers in the Christmas Day parade, and I went up to them. They were holding this banner.

AH: Were they in red?

EW: They could have been. They were wearing step-dancing costumes. And I ran up to them and said, "Where are you from?" And they said they were from Quincy.

AH: That's them. I'd almost be certain that's Joan Forbes. There are other teachers, but in the Quincy area she's the best. Apart from everything else, they're just really nice people. Some dance teachers I'm not too fond of.

EW: They're tough.

356 AH: When I teach fiddle, I like them to do well, but I'd rather teach with love than teach with anger. There's one or two here, and I won't play for them.

EW: Do you play at performances or rehearsal?

AH: Every year the Forbes had a rehearsal, and every year I play for that. If they're dancing somewhere where they need a musician, as a rule they call me. Lots of times they use CD's.

EW: What's the difference between music for step dancing and music for performance?

AH: Tempo. Now the Irish dancing tempo is getting slower and slower all the time. I think it's losing some of its luster.

EW: Because?

AH: They're putting more into the steps.

EW: What do you think of the phenomenon of "River Dance?"

380 AH: I think it's fantastic. I think it's the best thing that's happened to Irish music as well as dancing. Irish music got a huge boost after "River Dance." There are a few small things I don't like about the new way of dancing, but in general I was delighted with it. For instance, this thing of holding your hand on your hip. That's a Scottish thing. That's not Irish. So I hate when they do it.

EW: Yes. Usually your hands are straight down.

AH: Or up when you're holding someone, but they shouldn't be up unless you're holding on to a partner in Irish dance. But it's a new flavor. That's Scottish, so you're moving away from the Irish tradition.

EW: So you're changing the tradition. Is that Michael Flatley's fault?

AH: (Laughs.) Mr. Flatley. Strange man.

SIDE B

Tape has long header.

00 Continues mentioning the impact of Flatley.

20 Discusses how much he likes to play music and listen to the music that his students play. Mentions that if he wins one person over to Irish music one night then the night is a success...Mentions that his family had a family band in Ireland (called the Marlboroughs) and that he was the lead singer. His favorite song he likes to sing is about a couple who go through a lot and make it through. "After All These Years). He relates that when he came to the states he had nothing. Sometimes he didn't know where his next meal was coming from or where they would sleep.

47 Talks about his "clever" brother who is a wealthy businessman who has been in business for 30 years. [He is the equivalent of Home Depots all

- over Ireland.] Aidan played at his brother's affair. Aidan mentions that he has more opportunity here to play music. "I appreciate
- 60 the United States." Especially likes the song "Dublin, My Tears" which he sings often. The song is about leaving Dublin and returning to find it isn't the same town. Likes dad's song, "Down on the Glenside." Most of his songs are songs from home or from his family.
- 110 Sings a "1916" song, "Down by the Glenside."
- 133 Most songs have "to do with something in my life." Doesn't sing political songs. Feels that he lives here now...Irish Americans romanticizing the troubles. He doesn't talk about politics now. Has an interest in American politics, "thinks of the underdog." Talks about working for Greg Hanley, local politician in Quincy. Played music for him.
- 162 What is the future of Irish music? Was in Virginia last year and played at a fair. He couldn't understand why the Irish music was the big attraction...folks were not Irish. Everything was bluegrass or Cajun...strong interest in Irish music.
- 192 Now spends a lot of time writing music. Compiling a selection of music that shows his style of playing. Has a different style than other traditional players. Has a background of classical music, pop music and a rock band when he played fiddle....Aidan discusses influence of rock music he played as a young teen. Comes out with a bow. He adds or deletes something to the music difference playing a traditional style and adding something in
- 193 Plays a tune as an example.
- Teaches students. "I always them not to copy me. Develop your own style." Records disc for first time in the next week. To be recorded in a home in Quincy. Wanted to record with some one he knew. Four of his students will play too....Recorded on many CDs playing in the background, like on the Noel Henry Show band.

End of Tape.